



3 strategies of change

A mapping exercise of actions to strategies

A Good Life for All – worldwide – is a vision for societal change that has never existed in this form before. It is about a conscious, peaceful, and democratic process to transform society so that all people can live a good life.

Today's society is based on the exploitation of people and nature, and on economic growth. Therefore, a socio-ecological transformation involves physical, economic, social, and cultural changes. This kind of change can be compared – if at all – to major historical transitions, such as industrialization.

Historically, such profound changes occur through complex processes that affect various areas, such as politics, society, the environment, and culture. These processes can sometimes unfold quickly, loudly, and abruptly, but also gradually, steadily, and unnoticed. There is no fixed plan and no central body that directs the change. Instead, it is a collective search for a good life for all and the paths to get there. Such profound social transformations are always marked by intense controversies, public debates, and often conflicts. Many of those who currently benefit from existing structures are unwilling to give up their privileges. Additionally, there are differing ideas about what a solidary, just, and livable future should look like.

People advocating for a good life for all pursue a variety of different strategies, either consciously or unconsciously. In civil society, there is lively exchange and discussion about which strategies are most effective in advancing socio-ecological change. What someone considers an effective strategy often depends on their "theory of change," i.e., their understanding of how social and political change occurs in general.

What does "strategy" actually mean?

The term strategy comes from ancient Greek and translates roughly as "leadership of an army." Originally used mainly in a military context, the term strategy is now used much more broadly. It usually refers to a kind of action plan aimed at achieving a specific goal.

Strategy often sounds like a rigid plan developed and implemented by a few smart minds. But such plans often fail because the world is constantly changing, and change cannot be entirely planned or controlled. Therefore, there is no single "right" strategy for change. A variety of strategies are needed for socio-ecological transformation, which must be flexible and adapt to given and changing conditions. Activist and author adrienne maree brown emphasizes that strategies can never be fully formulated in advance and implemented exactly as planned but must remain open to change and the unexpected. Different strategies can complement each other. No one needs to do everything at once. Groups and individuals can support each other when working toward similar goals.





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In the degrowth movement and the climate justice movement, a variety of approaches and strategies are pursued. In trying to structure these strategies, some scholars refer to a strategic analysis by sociologist Erik Olin Wright and further develop it (e.g., Schmelzer & Vetter 2021, Chertkovskaya 2024). Three strategies are frequently mentioned in this context (see also documents on the definitions of the three strategies):

- **Nowtopias:** Making or building something yourself that is more sustainable or fairer. Trying out and practicing a different way of working together on a small scale - in the form of new practices, institutions, infrastructures or forms of organisation.
- **Radical reforms:** Creating (political) framework conditions that make it easier to act sustainably and fairly. Advancing laws and regulations that start in the here and now and focus on the good life for all.
- **Resistance and building counter-power:** (Publicly) opposing something that is judged to be unjust or unsustainable; seeking a direct confrontation or a break with existing institutions and social structures.

The interplay of these three strategies is central to socio-ecological transformation: The grassroots pressure of social movements, the experimentation and development of new ideas, and supportive policies work together and reinforce each other. On the one hand, the spread of Nowtopias requires broad societal change. On the other hand, the implementation of radical reforms depends on building counter-hegemony to enable deep changes in specific areas of society. This counter-hegemony also develops through the spread of Nowtopias, which serve as experimental learning and experience spaces. The method "3 Strategies for Change" works with these strategies.





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Suggestion for assigning the action cards to the three strategies

Nowtopias

- Taking a Shift at a Free Store
- Organizing a "Kitchen for all"
- Supporting a Community Health Clinic
- Joining a Local "Chaostreff"
- Working in a Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA) Project
- Becoming a member of a renewable energy cooperative
- Functional living
- Helping out at repair cafés
- Organizing a solidarity event
- Organizing a reading circle

Radical reforms

- Establishing the 4-day workweek as the norm
- Advancing agricultural structure laws
- Cancelling debts for countries of the Global South
- Anchoring the "Whole Institution Approach" in the education system
- Socializing hospitals
- Opening borders for freedom of movement for all
- Enforcing standards for digital technology
- Implementing a socio-ecological tax policy
- Gradually dismantling car privileges
- Expropriating real estate for public welfare

Resistance and building counter-power

- Organizing a Workplace Occupation
- Participating in a Strike
- Participating in a Protest Performance
- Co-organizing a Demonstration
- Cleaning Compost Toilets at Protest Camps
- Supporting a Land Occupation
- Organizing a Regional Networking Meeting
- Organizing a "Kiss-in"
- Organizing a Vigil
- Telling Different Stories





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Further reading:

- adrienne maree brown (2017): *Emergent Strategy*.
www.adriennemareebrown.net/book/emergent-strategy/
- Ashish Kothari, Ariel Salleh, Arturo Escobar, Federico Demaria, Alberto Acosta (eds.) (2018): *Pluriverse. A Post-Development Dictionary*.
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- Campus for world-changing practice: *Changing the world requires knowledge and tools*.
www.weltveraendern.org/tools_und_theorien/
- E.O. Wright (2017): *Real Utopias. Paths out of Capitalism*. www.suhrkamp.de/buch/erik-olin-wright-reale-utopien-t-9783518297926
- I.L.A. Kollektiv (2022): *Turning the World Upside Down*. www.ilakollektiv.org/die-welt-auf-den-kopf-stellen.html • I.L.A. Kollektiv (2019): *The Good Life for All*.
www.oekom.de/buch/das-gute-leben-fuer-alle-9783962380953
- Rosa Luxemburg Foundation & Konzeptwerk neue Ökonomie: *Exit Crisis*. Linx Online Learning Platform. www.linx.rosalux.de/themen/exitkrise
- Schmelzer, Matthias & Vetter, Andrea (2021): *Degrowth/Postgrowth: An Introduction*.
www.junius-verlag.de/Programm/Zur-Einfuehrung/Degrowth-Postwachstum-zur-Einfuehrung.html

Sources:

- brown, adrienne maree (2017): *Emergent Strategy*. AK Press.
- Chertkovskaya, Ekaterina (2022): *A strategic canvas for degrowth: in dialogue with Erik Olin Wright*. In: *Degrowth & Strategy. How to bring about social-ecological transformation*. Mayfly Press.
- I.L.A. Kollektiv (eds.) (2022): *Turning the World Upside Down: Strategies for Radical Transformation*. A handbook for people in social movements. Oekom Verlag.
- Schmelzer, Matthias & Vetter, Andrea (2021): *Degrowth/Postgrowth: An Introduction*. Junius Verlag.
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